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ABSTRACT

Chinese and Japanese immigrants to the United States and Canada have survived years of discrimination and oppression and today demonstrate academic and professional achievements that are often better than those of whites. However, the Asians continue to obtain higher scores on nonverbal/spatial tests than on verbal tests and tend to be concentrated in professions that require fewer verbal skills. Some studies suggest that genetic differences between Asians and whites, especially differences in basic temperament, may account for Asians' superior performance compared to whites and for the fact that Asians perform better on nonverbal tests. Language difficulties seem to have had a minor effect on Asians' verbal abilities. The main explanation for Asians' abilities and achievements appears to lie in their patterns of family upbringing and values, which can provide sufficient motivation to overcome the handicaps created by discrimination. (Author/MJL)

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Abilities of North American Orientals:
A Study in Acculturation

by
Philip E. Vernon

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ABILITIES OF NORTH AMERICAN ORIENTALS - A STUDY IN ACCULTURATION

By Philip E. Vernon IAAP, Edinburgh, July 1982

According to Webster's Dictionary, a keynote address is designed to present an issue of particular concern to an audience, with the aim of stimulating unity and enthusiasm. Now obviously the Chinese and Japanese in North America are not of much concern to British and European educational psychologists; though if 30,000 of them lived in Edinburgh, as they do in my home-town of Calgary (which is of similar size), Scottish members might take more notice. Nor can I expect to arouse much unity and enthusiasm about the topic. But I do hope to convey something of my own interest because the acculturation of these minority groups in the United States and Canada seems to shed some new light on the effects of hereditary and environmental factors on group differences and group interactions. Frankly I have become rather bored with the endless controversies over black-white differences in America, and parts of England. But orientals have in the past been subjected to the same kind of adverse environment, poverty, discrimination, and oppression, as have the American blacks, and yet have survived them, and now obtain higher scores on many mental tests, and reach higher levels of educational and occupational achievement. How did this come about? And how did oriental immigrants and their descendants become acculturated so completely to white norms, despite the major differences in their cultures and languages? My answer will involve a kind of blend of history, sociology, psychology and psychometrics.

First a word about numbers. The figures given in Table 1 are only approximations, since the 1981 census returns have not

yet been published. In both the U.S. and Canada, the oriental totals are substantial; but the percentages are quite small. They reach 1% or over along the Pacific West coast. However, around the 1900s they often exceeded 10%; in other words the Chinese and Japanese were as visible minorities as are the West Indians in parts of London. Much the largest proportions live in Hawaii - about one third of its population.

History

The story of oriental immigration and adjustment was very similar in the United States and Canada. The original Chinese came in 1840 from mainland China; though nowadays almost all are from Taiwan or Hong Kong. They were brought in as labourers in the gold-fields, or gang workers on road and railroad building. In Hawaii they were recruited to work in the sugar cane and pineapple plantations. From 1880 on the Japanese were similarly imported. Both were regarded, in the late 19th century, as a kind of subhuman species, suitable only for menial jobs, as labourers, launderers, or houseboys. Naturally they moved out of such employment as early as possible into urban jobs, e.g. small businesses and restaurants, or into market gardening or fishing. Though many of them returned home, more came to take their place. And as they were now undercutting whites by working for low wages, intense hostility, vilification, discrimination, even violent attacks, were launched against them by the public, the press, and the politicians. Only after 1922, when further Chinese immigration was banned, but wives and children could join their husbands and fathers, did the situation stabilize.

The Japanese immigrants to North America were even more hated

than the Chinese, because they were less passive, more pushing, and still more successful economically. The 'Yellow Peril' was regarded as a threat to white supremacy in the west coast states and provinces, because of the ever-increasing numbers, and the fear of war and invasion. For Japan had become a major Asian power with her defeat of the Russian navy in 1905. After the Pearl Harbour attack in 1941, almost all the west coast Japanese in both countries were evacuated to inland concentration camps, often under conditions of severe hardship. Their homes, businesses and property were confiscated, and only minimal compensation paid after the war. The fact that some three-quarters of these evacuees were Canadian or American citizens, also the fact that there were far more Germans and Italians living near the coast than Japanese, were conveniently ignored. However, in Hawaii, there were far too many Japanese to intern or evacuate, and they became loyal supporters of the American war effort.

By 1947, public and political rancour against the Japanese subsided, and America helped to put Japan back on her feet . The gateways to full education for orientals were opened, along with entry to almost any occupation, including the professions. Thus it was not long before the Japanese Americans had propelled themselves into the middle class. The perseverance and patience of the Chinese also won their way. Orientals are still subject to subtle forms of discrimination; for example they seldom attain the top-grade jobs, which would give them executive power over white colleagues. But rampant racial prejudice has almost disappeared, and nowadays up to a half of all oriental marriages in North America are cross-ethnic, i.e. with non-oriental spouses. Thus the numbers

of part-oriental Americans would soon exceed the numbers of pure-bred, but for the continuous influx of new immigrants. Between 1950 and 1970 the total numbers in the U.S. actually doubled, from a half to one million (including, of course, some natural birth increases). To such an extent have they absorbed American culture that they think of themselves as Americans or Canadians, rather than as orientals. Nevertheless many of the old values persist, as shown in their upbringing of their children. And there is still much interest in preserving their languages, their festivities, and their foods.

Research on Orientals

Turning now to research studies of the intelligence and achievements of oriental school children: these began in California and Hawaii from 1913 on. Their scores were usually well below those of whites on tests involving verbal reasoning or memory, and reading comprehension. But on tests of rote memory, spatial, drawing, and nonverbal reasoning, they equalled or often surpassed those of whites. S.D. Porteus in Honolulu in 1926, reported mean Binet IQs of 93 to 94 for Chinese and Japanese; while on his own Mazes test, Japanese averaged 102, Chinese 95. Little information was provided by researchers as to the socioeconomic status (SES) and educational levels of the parents; but they would probably have been largely lower-middle and working classes. The usual languages of the homes would certainly be Cantonese or Japanese.

The first investigation in Canada was by Sandiford and Kerr (1926), using the Pintner-Paterson Performance scale, with the results shown in Table 2. Here the mean IQs are remarkably high, especially those of Japanese. But the authors admit that the method

of scoring, and the norms for this scale are dubious. Also I suggest that there was no compulsory schooling for orientals in Vancouver at that time; hence it is possible that school attenders came mainly from superior home backgrounds.

Kline and Lee carried out an important study of Chinese in Vancouver in 1972, whose results are shown in Table 3. They tested 277 children in Grades 1 to 3, who were continuing to study Chinese in private schools as well as learning English at public schools. Reading tests were given in both languages: 13% were backward in Chinese only, 9% in English only, and 6% in both. The Chinese-only group scored the same as the nonretarded majority on several tests; but those retarded in English, or English and Chinese scored less well, especially on WISC Verbal, Bender, and Draw-a-Man. Their WISC Performance IQs were still better than the white norm. Note that the IQs for the total group were 99 Verbal, 112 Nonverbal - an astonishing result considering that the children's parents were almost all recent immigrants, in fairly low-grade jobs, and the authors state that Chinese was spoken almost exclusively in the homes.

I myself gained access to the Calgary School Board print-outs, which list scores on standardized tests. At the 9th Grade, the Differential Aptitude Test battery was given to 122 Chinese and a control group of white children at the same schools. Taking the white means as 100 on each test, Table 4 gives the Deviation Quotients for Chinese. Clearly the Chinese boys were close to whites on the verbal and English tests, and much superior on Nonverbal Reasoning and Spatial ability. Both sexes were superior on Number Computation and Spelling; but the other girls' scores are lower, and less reliable, as the group was small. The differences from boys probably arise because Chinese parents induce very strong edu-

cational motivation in their sons, but are relatively unconcerned about daughters.

As usual there is much overlapping in the distributions of oriental and white scores, variations in ability within ethnic groups being greater than those between groups. To illustrate this, I took the D.A.T. Number Computation test and divided the whites into the top and bottom 15%, and the above and below average groups of 35%. Calling these the A, B, C and D groups, the proportions of Chinese in each group are shown in Table 5. Clearly the Chinese get many more A and B marks than whites, and much fewer Ds. Nevertheless there are considerable numbers of Chinese in the below average C group.

An ex-student of mine, Dr. J. Chan, has tested large numbers in Hong Kong, where almost all students are Chinese. But they learn English from Grade 3 on, since government, commerce, and university teaching are conducted in this language. Thus fluency in English is the gateway to the best jobs. The means for various age groups on Raven Matrices and Heim's AH4 nonverbal section are again equal or superior to white norms; though the means on AH4 verbal section are lower. Similar results were obtained by Rodd (1959) in Taiwan, using the Cattell Culture-Fair test. However I suspect that these Asian groups were to some extent selected, since it is improbable that all the children of illegal immigrants in Hong Kong attend school; and there is a considerable drop-out before reaching secondary school.

A great many other studies in the United States mainland and Hawaii, covering children from Grade 1 to college freshmen, have shown much the same pattern with verbal scores or IQs usually a

little, but not much, below those of whites, and scores on visuo-spatial or mathematics tests usually exceeding them. Note that all these tests were constructed by Caucasians for Caucasian children, and yet the Japanese and Chinese, with different mother-tongues and different cultures, equalled or surpassed the norms. Psychologists who criticise any application of white tests to non-whites might like to consider this.

The three Wechsler scales and the revised WISC-R have all been adapted and restandardized on large samples in Japan itself. The main results are shown in Table 6, as published by Lynn (1977, 1982). However the figures are based only on some performance tests and Digit Span, since there is no way of controlling the difficulties of other subtests which had to be translated. It is clear from these and other researches that Japanese in Japan tend to score above American whites on performance tests; but no comparisons can be made of verbal IQs. More convincing evidence of intellectual superiority is offered by Husen's International Educational Achievement Project. He and his collaborators showed Japanese achievements in mathematics and science to be considerably higher than those of American and British students in the same age groups. Lynn also claims that an increase in Japanese performance IQs has occurred from the 1940s to 70s. While there might indeed be some post-war rise, it is doubtful whether all the samples were equally representative.

Though plenty of test results in Japan have been published, virtually no comparative information about Chinese in mainland China is available.

Oriental University Students and Professionals

A better indication of high academic ability, and professional

qualifications can be obtained from comparing university degree results of Chinese and Japanese Americans, and Caucasians, than from standardized tests. I analysed the 1978-80 Convocation lists of degrees for over 4000 students at three universities, Calgary, British Columbia, and Hawaii. Picking out the numbers of Chinese and Japanese names, I found the proportion of Chinese in Calgary getting degrees to be much the same as their proportion in the general population. But in Vancouver, the proportions of orientals were much higher than in the city population; and at Honolulu, twice as many Chinese obtained degrees as would be expected from their population figures. The major feature of college degrees in all three universities was the concentration of orientals in certain Faculties, both at BA, MA and Doctoral levels. Chinese are greatly over-represented in Science, Engineering, and Business, and under-represented in Arts, Social Studies and Education. Thus at the University of Calgary, 17% of all degrees in these three Faculties were obtained by Chinese, and only 1.7% in all the remaining subjects. There were barely enough Japanese in western Canada to separate them from Chinese. But in Hawaii they show more interest than Chinese in Education; and this is their most frequent choice. Hawaiian orientals also produce many medical doctors and dentists; indeed one half of all qualified dentists on Oahu are Japanese.

At the Doctoral level, McCarthy and Wolfle (1975) analysed all Doctorates obtained by minority group students in all major American universities in 1969-72. Three and a half times as many orientals achieved this high level of educational success as would be expected from their numbers in the total population. Again they

were chiefly found in Science, Engineering and Mathematics, very few in Education, the Arts, or Psychology. At the opposite extreme, native Indians and blacks produced half or fewer doctors per capita. These and other investigations indicated that both Chinese and Japanese prefer concrete and numerical subjects which depend relatively little on verbal abilities, and avoid more theoretical, abstract, or verbally dependent subjects. This accords with the patterns of test scores on spatial, number, and verbal tests among oriental children.

Perhaps the most striking findings are those of N. Weyl (1969), who tabulated the proportions of 5 ethnic groups represented in 12 different professions. The numbers given in my Table 7 are proportional to those in the total American population. Thus the overall total for Chinese of 256 means that 2½ times as many Chinese end up in professional employment as would be expected from their numbers in the population. They produced 5 times as many Architects and College Professors, and their lowest proportions were among Lawyers, Judges and Clergymen, that is highly verbal professions. Japanese obtained lower proportions than Chinese, but they were about twice as frequent as whites among Architects, Artists, Scientists and Technicians. In another analysis Weyl included Jews, finding them to produce the greatest proportion of professionals per capita, as might be expected from their high scholastic reputation. But the Chinese were very little behind them.

It is interesting that Chinese Americans show higher professional achievement than Japanese. But probably the latter produce far more business executives and industrialists. Their children are nearly the same on verbal ability tests, but Japanese usually score somewhat higher on nonverbal tests.

Discussion

The ensuing discussion may seem rather speculative and subjective; but it does consist of inferences from factual data, and hypotheses for further research.

Now when one population scores consistently higher than another on intelligence or achievement tests, one thinks first that the parents of the intelligent group must be above average in education and SES. Either they are passing on superior genes to their children, or providing a superior environment, or both. However in the case of the Chinese, it is well known that the original immigrant parents were of poor peasant stock; and in many investigations it is stated that the parents of Chinese American children were of low SES. Possibly this is misleading. Chinese parents in the 1840s to 1920s may have been low in SES because labouring and semiskilled jobs were almost the only ones they could get. The fact that many fathers were good launderers does not imply that they could not have been successful in much more skilled occupations. This would explain why the correlations between parental SES and children's school achievement are lower than those usually found for whites. Thus Jensen obtained a correlation of about .15. It has also been observed in other ethnic groups of immigrants where the first-generation fathers appear to have been of low-intelligence stock, that the second or third generation children tend to regress upwards from the parental level to the mean IQ of the American population.

The original Japanese also came as peasants. But in the 1870s some 75% of the Japanese population belonged to the peasant class. Thus there must have been many with above average ability and re-

sourcefulness; and some writers believe that immigrants to America were those with superior ability. Since the end of World War II it is possible that the majority of immigrants from Japan, Taiwan and Hong Kong have come largely from skilled business and professional occupations; though I have not come across any verification of this. Thus there may have been a rise in the overall ability level of oriental Americans and Canadians from the 1950s on. But we really have no convincing evidence of genetic superiority or inferiority.

On the other hand, there are two strong reasons for thinking that certain genetic racial differences are of importance. First there has been a lot of research on infants and young children, showing that oriental babies are more passive and less excitable than Caucasians in basic temperament. Observational studies by Caudill and Weinstein (1969), Kagan (1978), and especially D.G. Freedman (1974) indicate that these differences are present before the influence of maternal child-rearing can have had any effects; though admittedly the mothers' treatment tends to reinforce the non-aggressive and strongly group-dependent characteristics of older oriental children and adults. Chinese and Japanese children are much more compliant and obedient at school than whites, and thus are more readily educable. Freedman has further observed Navajo Indian babies, finding the same characteristics of temperament and child-rearing as in orientals. This point is of particular interest, since native Indians and Eskimos are believed to have come from the same Mongoloid stock as Chinese and Japanese, emigrating via the Bering Straits to America between about 3 to 20 thousand years ago. They resemble orientals in many ways, such as warmth of upbringing, and

encouragement of sharing with others rather than competing. I have not time to expand on this today, but would mention that my wife and I are planning further research with Pacific Coast Indians next year.

My second reason for suggesting something genetic is that we find the typical pattern of superiority in visuospatial and nonverbal over verbal abilities among Japanese and Chinese in their own countries, or in North America, and among native Indians.

The obvious objection to a genetic explnation is that the mother-tongue of all these groups is usually non-English; hence they are handicapped in doing verbal tests. But it is not as simple as that. Nowadays there are very large numbers of oriental Americans who have been speaking English for several generations; and it is true that the gap between orientals and whites in verbal abilities has tended to close over the years. Yet these people continue to show superiority on the nonverbal side.

Another relevant point is that the strong educational motivation and parental pressure of oriental children is very similar to that of Jewish children. How is it, then, that Jews are certainly the most able ethnic group in verbal abilities, but are relatively weak in spatial? Surely one would expect the verbal abilities of orientals to be pushed up by home and school influences, not the spatial. Is there, then, some genetic or constitutional difference between Mongoloid and Caucasian or Semitic peoples? One wonders whether lateralization of functions differs, Caucasians being more left-hemispheric, and Mongoloids more right-hemispheric in information processing. But if this is true it is suprising that , to my knowledge, no one has demonstrated it. Another characteristic

common to all four groups considered here is their productiveness in the visual arts. This too suggests right hemisphericity.

A further line of argument is that orientals are relatively weak in verbal skills because their own languages and orthographies are so utterly different from the Caucasian alphabetic system. If then they continue to learn Chinese or Japanese in private schools, and use them at home - as many families do - one would expect them to have much greater difficulties with English than immigrants from, say, Germany or Italy. However the facts are quite contrary. Present-day oriental children in their home counties have surprisingly little difficulty in learning to read and write Chinese or Japanese. According to Makita (1968), there are virtually no dyslexics in Japan, and the 5% or so with reading problems in the first grade have disappeared by fourth grade. We can only conclude that oriental scripts are a good deal more logical and phonic than they appear to us. For something like 10% of our elementary school children of all ages are seriously retarded in learning alphabetic script.

Even more surprising was Kline and Lee's finding that immigrant children in Vancouver had no great difficulty in learning English, while still studying Chinese out of school, and mainly using it at home. Though there were 15% in Grades 1 to 3 with problems in reading English, the numbers had dropped to 5% by the end of 3rd grade.

I collected some information myself from Calgary Chinese. Table 8 shows that 61% of my students who answered a questionnaire said that they mostly or always spoke Chinese at home, whereas 74% claimed to use English all the time with friends. One half of the group arrived in Canada in the last 5 years, and half

were longer-term residents or Canadian-born. But there were no significant differences between the two groups in achievement; nor did those who attended Chinese language schools do worse than those who did not attend. This was confirmed by Arthur Jensen in a survey of children in San Francisco's Chinatown. He found that those born abroad were little inferior in English achievement to those born in America, and that those from homes where much Chinese was spoken were also only slightly handicapped. The average correlation for these factors was -.16.

Though the evidence is far from complete, it indicates that the major environmental factor in oriental children's English achievement is the extent to which they mix with Caucasians, or English-speaking orientals, in and out of school. Up to the 1920s and 30s, Chinese and Japanese were usually segregated in housing areas, where all their acquaintances spoke the mother tongue. Nowadays, even in San Francisco, the majority live outside Chinatown or Little Tokyo, and the children are accepted by their white peers at English-medium schools.

I conclude then that the relative weakness in oriental verbal abilities is not attributable just to difficulties in learning English, or to the confusions caused by bilinguality. These factors have a minor influence, but it is likely that some genetic differences are also involved in spatial and numerical as against verbal abilities.

However the main explanation of oriental abilities and achievements probably lies in their family upbringing and values. These have been described by Benedict and others, as follows:

1. Warmth and security in the preschool years.

2. Firm control of behaviour from about 3 years, not permissiveness.

3. Cohesion within the family, and with kin and family ancestors.

4. Adherence to accepted conventions of social behaviour.

5. Discouragement of egocentricity, emphasis on obligations to others.

6. Loyalty and obedience to the authorities, employers, and the State.

7. Motivation for educational achievement.

8. Need for hard work to gain success, and to honour the family.

These were particularly characteristic of Japanese in Japan from about 1870 to 1940. But they have also been largely retained in post-war Japan and among Japanese Americans, despite their high degree of acculturation to American norms.

Chinese family values and upbringing are generally similar, though there are differences which I haven't time to mention today. The differences probably derive very largely from historical and geographical causes: the much greater area and population of China, the greater homogeneity and nationalism of Japan; the lack of natural resources in Japan, leading to the build-up of an exporting economy, based on acceptance of western technology. The paths of the two countries have diverged further apart over the past hundred years. Likewise the various groups of emigrants and their descendants in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Hawaii, the United States and Canada have diverged in various ways, providing sociologists and psychologists with rich opportunities for further research.

At the outset I claimed that studies of orientals throw some new light on heredity-environment problems. In conclusion, let me summarize the main findings that illustrate this.

1. Severe discrimination against minority group members does

not necessarily retard the intellectual growth of their children, or their educational and occupational achievements. The cultural values and child-rearing practices of such people can provide sufficient motivation to overcome these handicaps.

2. Likewise, differences in languages between minority and majority children have only temporary and minor influences, if there is much intermixing between the groups.

3. When a minority group shares many of the norms and concepts of the majority, mental tests devised for the majority can be validly applied to the minority.

4. Though the problems of racial differences in general intelligence remain unsolved, there may be genetic or constitutional factors involved in different ability patterns. And there is strong evidence of racial differences in basic temperamental qualities, which underlie personality and culture.

Table 6. Mean Wechsler Performance IQs (R. Lynn, 1977, 1982)

Scale	Ages	N	Mean IQ
WISC	5-15	1070	103.1
WAIS	35-44	1682	104.0
WPPSI	4-6	600	111.7
WISC R	6-16	1100	110.7

Table 8. Language Usage of 112 Chinese cildren in Calgary

	At Home	With Friends
Chinese all the time	13	0
Chinese mostly	48	3
English mostly	32	23
English all the time	9	74

Table 7. Contributions of 5 Ethnic Groups to American Professions in 1960 (Weyl, 1969)

	Whites	Negroes	Indians	Japanese	Chinese
Accountants	112	7	38	166	174
Architects	110	5	0	232	506
Artists and Writers	110	16	133	209	136
College Professors	107	32	0	143	537
School Teachers	103	76	86	120	318
Engineers	111	5	57	124	303
Natural Scientists	109	20	0	205	438
Lawyers and Judges	111	11	19	54	53
Clergymen	104	66	124	89	23
Physicians	108	21	10	182	302
Nurses	106	54	124	116	76
Technicians	107	36	86	201	197
Total Means	108	29	56	155	256

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ABILITIES OF NORTH AMERICAN ORIENTALS - A STUDY IN ACCULTURATION

Philip E. Vernon IAAP, Edinburgh, July 1982

Table 1. Numbers and Percentages of Chinese and Japanese Living Abroad in 1970.

	Chinese		Japanese	
Numbers in Own Country	800 million		110 million	
In Taiwan (nationalists)	3 million	(20%)	-	
Hong Kong	5 million	(98%)	-	
USA	450,000	(0.2%)	600,000	(0.3%)
California	180,000	(0.9%)	215,000	(1.1%)
Hawaii	55,000	(6.8%)	220,000	(28.3%)
Canada	120,000	(0.6%)	40,000	(0.2%)
Vancouver	40,000	(3.6%)	15,000	(1.0%)

Table 2. Performance IQs of Vancouver Orientals (Sandiford & Kerr, 1926)

	N	Chin. Mean	N	Jap. Mean
Males	131	107.7	144	115.4
Females	93	107.0	132	112.8
Both	224	107.4	276	114.2

Table 5. Distribution of Number Test Scores of Whites and Chinese

Mark	White	Chinese
A	15%	23%
B	35	47
C	35	27
D	15	3

Table 3. Vancouver Chinese: Test Results of Poor Readers (Kline & Lee, 1972)

	%	WISC Verbal IQ	WISC Nonverbal	Low Bender	Low Draw-a-Man
No reading problems	72	101	113	23%	26%
Problems in Chinese	13				
Problems in English only	9	89	108	66	61
English and Chinese	6				
Total Group	100	99	112	29	31

Table 4. Deviation Quotients for Calgary Ninth Grade Boys and Girls on D.A.T. Battery (Vernon, 1982)

	80 Boys	42 Girls
Verbal Analogies	99	94
Number Computation	110*	111*
Nonverbal Reasoning	109*	98
Mechanical Comprehension	103	94
Spatial Ability	107*	105*
English Usage	101	97
Total	105*	100

* = Significant at .01